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Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission  
1900 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
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To the Commissioners:

At the Planning and Sustainability Commission's hearing on Pembina's proposed Port of Portland propane terminal on Tuesday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, the commissioners on a number of occasions seemed to express genuine interest in the climate significance of the project, both in a general global sense and in terms of Oregon and Portland's climate policies. I have already submitted comments on the project, but thought in light of the discussion that occurred at the hearing it might be prudent to provide some additional information and analysis on this project, its immediate context in the rise of North American fossil fuel extraction, and its broad context of climate change.

### **Transportation and Infrastructure are the Primary Constraints on New Fossil Fuel Developments in North America**

Simply put, Pembina lied to you when they told you at the hearing, in response to a direct question, that Portland was their “first choice” for this project—it is their first choice only in the sense that they know at the outset have no others. Transporting hydrocarbons by rail is more expensive than by pipeline. (1) They are not opting to incur the additional costs of a rail route rather than a pipeline directly to oceangoing vessel—and of a rail route subject to a massive southern detour, at that—for the proximity it would give the facility to Voodoo Doughnuts and Powell's Books. The construction of hydrocarbon pipelines through British Columbia, and the construction of hydrocarbon terminals on BC's West Coast, has become politically and economically less and less plausible with each passing day, as numerous putative developments have been languishing for years due to regulatory hurdles, grassroots pressure, and physical blockades.

The delays in these projects are emphatically not owing to any overarching climate policy on the part of the international community, Canada, or British Columbia: neither the United Nations nor any other international entity has a regulatory mechanism for limiting fossil fuel developments, Canada is eagerly embracing its newfound identity as a petro-state, and British Columbia's climate policy consists largely of a speculative cap and trade scheme which wouldn't even take into account the volume of fossil fuels transmitted through its borders.

Rather, these delays are a result of massive grassroots pressure. Every single pipeline proposed to run to BC's West Coast—the Pacific Trails gas pipeline, the Northern Gateway and Trans Mountain tar sands pipelines, to name a few—are subject to indefinite delays. A Kinder Morgan

crew surveying the Trans Mountain pipeline's route on BC's Burnaby Mountain was unable to finish its work owing to massive protests in which more than 100 people were arrested, (2) and the city of Burnaby, which is opposed to the project, is now trying to recover the \$100,000 per day it spent arresting people from the company. (3) After a prolonged regulatory processes, Enbridge and Chevron still face a First Nations blockade of the routes of the Northern Gateway and Pacific Trails pipelines—blockaders have evicted pipeline surveyors who have entered traditional Unist'ot'en territory. (4)

Nor have pipelines south or east fared any better. Owing to unprecedented public opposition, Keystone XL has been subject to a more than five year long regulatory process; should it receive approval, Lakota land defenders have vowed to be “dead or in prison” before allowing it to be built. (5)

Indeed, a 2014 report by Oil Change International estimates that the cumulative effect of transportation constraints created by grassroots pressure on Alberta's tar sands has been the cancellation of at least three mining projects, preventing the emission of 2.8 billion metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere, as well as reducing the price of bitumen from existing operations at a cost to the industry of \$17.1 billion. (6) This figure does not take into account the additional effects of resistance to gas pipelines.

These effects have not by any means been limited to Alberta. The glut of natural gas on the market, increasing regulatory constraints, and grassroots and NGO pressure have conspired to diminish the market for coal in the United States. Coal companies as a result have undertaken numerous efforts to build marine terminals for the export of coal to foreign markets. Again, while there is certainly no overarching climate policy in place preventing the construction of these terminals, all but four of 15 projects proposed throughout the US in the last two years have been defeated by grassroots pressure and legal challenges at some stage of the pre-construction regulatory process. (7) These victories are beginning to translate into tangible results at the sites of extraction: in 2013, for the first time ever, the BLM held an auction for 148.6 million tons of Powder River Basin coal, and no one bid. Coal companies stated that the market simply didn't justify investments in new mining operations. (8)

In other words, the perception of inevitability surrounding new fossil fuel developments—that if they don't occur in a given geographic location they will simply be constructed elsewhere—is false. It is a perception that manages to persist in the face of contrary evidence simply by virtue of being common; it is difficult to discard beliefs held by many others. But coal, oil and gas face transportation and infrastructure constraints all over the continent, from Alberta to North Dakota to Wyoming to Utah, (9) and peoples' determined efforts are making the future of a great deal of extraction—and thus of greenhouse gas emissions—extremely uncertain.

**In addition to immediate, material effects on greenhouse gas emissions, the Planning and Sustainability Commission is positioned to have a much larger effect on the broader political terrain**

In order for everything else to live, the fossil fuel industry must die. Under an unmitigated warming scenario (i.e. precisely the scenario we are currently on a trajectory toward), the

percentage of the Earth's species that will be extinct by mid-century is estimated in excess of 50%. (10) The most severe climate disruptions will occur in the planet's already beleaguered mid-latitudes, where human subsistence is precarious, violence is widespread, and post-colonial social and political institutions are weak—places like Somalia, Kyrgyzstan, and Brazil—promising levels of social chaos and human misery that will make even the bloody tumult that was the 20<sup>th</sup> century look trivial in comparison. (11) Which is not to say that chaotic social collapse will be restricted to the mid-latitudes: the Pentagon is actively preparing for widespread unrest in the United States owing to climatic and economic instability, going so far as to run military simulations where their combatants are coal-fired power plant protestors in Missouri. (12)

Owing to the scope and complexity of the global economy and the ubiquity of fossil fuels within it, it would certainly be nice if very large scale government entities—i.e. federal governments and international bodies—would establish broad policies to meaningfully address the climate crisis. The perception of the inevitability of fossil fuel developments has as its ugly twin the perception that federal legislation or international agreement will inevitably solve the problem those in smaller scales of government can't, thus negating the need for a state or a municipality to aggressively take responsibility for the greenhouse gases it has control over. With each successive international climate talk deteriorating into an ever more absurd spectacle of childish small-mindedness, (13) however, it has become clear that no one is going to save us—we must save ourselves.

But the intransigence of global and national bodies on climate, while terrifying and infuriating, also presents unique opportunities. I'd like to suggest that the Planning and Sustainability Commission not only is in a position to have an immediate effect of limiting fossil fuel development by rejecting this project, but in doing so to have an outsized impact on the overall cultural, political, and economic context in which climate change will or will not be addressed.

This is precisely because the tragic lack of global and national leadership on climate is a lack of initiative, where every party is reluctant to act out of fear that other parties will not also do so, thus preserving the status quo of rising emissions while unfairly disadvantaging their economies. When regulatory entities of any given scale acknowledge that we are in a *crisis*, which we must do absolutely everything in our power to address, they begin to shift the overall political dialogue away from self-perpetuating paralysis toward one of action. (14) The only hope for our planet, our species, and all of the other species we share it with is to demonstrate to the globally powerful what the courage and moral clarity they lack looks like *by possessing such courage and moral clarity ourselves*.

The question was raised more than once at the January 13<sup>th</sup> hearing of how the Pembina terminal relates to the greenhouse gas reduction targets outlined in Portland's Climate Action Plan. The simple answer is that it doesn't. The CAP, as is fairly common for greenhouse gas inventories, only accounts for emissions that occur within the boundaries of the city. (15) As far as the plan is concerned, Portland could build a network of fossil fuel infrastructure capable of transmitting all of Saudi Arabia's crude oil and all of Appalachia's coal to other destinations and still meet its carbon reduction targets. This is terrain which no extant regulatory framework explicitly addresses.

With respect to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions, the CAP states:

“Local governments have an indispensable role to play . . . with their important roles both in developing the fundamental shape of the community, transportation systems and buildings, and in helping individuals make informed choices about everyday business and personal choices.” (p. 9)

This is a profound truth, one whose far-reaching significance is perhaps best conveyed by also stating its converse: large-scale governments will not take the initiative for a post-carbon world on their own. Action on climate will come from the bottom up or it won't come at all. The actions we take in a given geographic locale can perpetuate the existing conceptual framework in which climate change is discussed, or they can radically shift it.

While regulatory entities have acquiesced to grassroots pressure by delaying fossil fuel projects or rejecting them outright, they have in most if not all cases done so on obscure procedural grounds rather than simply stating in a forthright manner that it is time to stop burning hydrocarbons. This has been the case with everything from Obama's agonizingly prolonged Keystone XL decision to the Oregon DEQ and DSL proceedings around the Boardman coal export facility. The Commission can therefore have a meaningful impact on the physical climate by rejecting this project, but an even more meaningful impact on the political climate by doing so in an unequivocal fashion, clearly stating that it is morally untenable to add to our society's already vastly excessive fossil fuel apparatus.

### **Direct challenges to the fossil fuel economy are more significant than support for speculative policies**

Contrary to the prevailing consensus of lawmakers and editorial boards, fossil fuel developments and infrastructure are actually just as valuable, if not more valuable, a nexus around which climate policy can be shaped as the abstract market and technological machinations currently in vogue. It is something of a convention to dismiss activists' efforts against individual fossil fuel projects as insignificant in the overall context of global greenhouse gas emissions, and that “overarching” or “comprehensive” climate policies are all that should be focused on.

This argument is appealing only insofar as one is willing to ignore the spectacular failure of so many of the broad climate policies that have been implemented around the world. Even if the political will did exist for federal climate legislation, or for the UNFCCC to agree on anything other than to hold another meeting in another year, the policies that would emerge from these processes would almost certainly be some combination of market manipulation (i.e. carbon tax, cap and trade, cap and tax) and funding for research into new technologies. What they emphatically wouldn't be are mechanisms for simply reducing fossil fuel production (i.e. statutorily phasing out oil fields, coal mines, pipelines), nor policies that acknowledged there are limits to economic growth (i.e. ensuring human wellbeing while reducing economic activity).

The models that currently exist within the political consensus for addressing the climate crisis are efforts like the European Union's notoriously catastrophic emissions trading scheme, which not only failed to reduce emissions but may have actually increased them, (16) a model whose

dominant logic underlies the Pacific Coast Action Plan on Climate and Energy signed by California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. (17)

Seemingly religious faith in markets and technology also predominates Oregon's truly hopeless efforts to meet its statutory emissions reduction target of 75% below 1990 levels by 2050. For instance, transportation is the largest emissions sector in Oregon. Even assuming all of the emissions reductions that are presented in the Statewide Transportation Strategy are possible (a generous assumption, considering that a great deal of these decreases are predicated on technologies which do not yet exist), the Oregon Department of Transportation frankly acknowledges it simply cannot envisage a scenario in which transportation emissions decline by 75%. (18) When one realizes a great deal of the greenhouse gas savings it forecasts that aren't from nonexistent technologies are from plug-in cars attached to an electric grid that has shifted away from fossil fuels, while the governor's action plan on energy (16) and the Oregon Global Warming Commission (19) can't figure out how to shift the grid from fossil fuels, it becomes clear the process has deteriorated into utter chaos. Equally convoluted ambiguities plague virtually every other element of Oregon's attempts thus far to curb greenhouse gases.

It is worth really pausing for a moment to let this register: Oregon literally *can't imagine* a means of diminishing fossil fuel use to statutorily required levels. It is not as if we are talking about some enormous technical challenge—designing gargantuan robots in deep space capable of writing classical music of heartbreaking beauty, for instance. We are talking about tending away from a material-technological complex that our species did not possess until a few centuries ago—and the people tasked with our survival simply can't conceive of a reality in which we do not possess it.

When we—people and policymakers alike, the Planning and Sustainability Commission included—challenge the fossil fuel economy itself, by rejecting its components (a pipeline, a rail line, a propane terminal), we divert the discourse around climate change away from the technical challenge it isn't to the moral challenge it is. Given the magnitude and urgency of the climate crisis, the only broad policies that make any sense are those that directly remove fossil fuels from circulation, rather than create speculative market and technological mechanisms to indirectly achieve this same end. We can adapt to a world without fossil fuels but not to a world with them. When we state this clearly, we express the central logic that everyone debating climate change in Washington Post editorials and international summits systematically fails to grasp, which is that life takes priority—we do not need to justify our right to a liveable planet, nor prove that a liveable planet is compatible with 21<sup>st</sup> century technology and patterns of consumption. The burden is on technological and economic systems to prove that they are compatible with life. If they are not, they have no value, and must be destroyed with great haste.

Everyone born since the end of World War II has lived their entire life being threatened by the dominant political and economic systems with annihilation. The imminent threat of nuclear war declined only in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with the near-synchronous ascendance of climate chaos as an existential threat to life on this planet. Climate change is perhaps the gravest crisis we've ever faced, but it also presents an opportunity. Decarbonizing our economy while leaving in place its frenetic pace of ecological devastation and its terrible inequalities only leaves the space open for the next, inevitable threat of annihilation. Carbon taxes and cap and trade systems do exactly

this. It is time for us shift the discussion around climate change away from agonizingly technical minutia to one about the fundamentally odious nature of a system that ceaselessly presents the specter of death.

You can help do this.

Sincerely,  
Scott Schroder  
Portland Rising Tide

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